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SUBJECT: PRESS CONFERENCE TO PUBLICIZE POSITIVE WORK OF
INTERNATIONAL NGOS IN SRI LANKA

¶1. The Ambassador and EU Head of Mission Wilson organized on February 7 a press conference to publicize the positive work that international NGOs are performing in Sri Lanka and condemn the recent campaign to discredit international NGOs. The German Ambassador (and EU President), the U.S. Ambassador and the Ambassadors of Australia and Switzerland all spoke and provided specific examples of the positive work that NGOs from their countries are doing in Sri Lanka.

¶2. Ambassador's remarks follow:

The United States attaches great importance to supporting the work of international NGOs and their indigenous Sri Lankan partners. This year the United States is providing almost \$160 million for development assistance and tsunami reconstruction programs in Sri Lanka. All of that assistance is implemented through our non-governmental partners.

Approximately 40 of the international NGOs in Sri Lanka are based in the United States. These American NGOs as well as other international and indigenous NGOs provide a wide range of valuable assistance to Sri Lankans in every part of Sri Lanka.

Following are just a few examples of the important work American NGOs are doing:

United Methodist Committee on Relief conducts emergency relief, shelter repair and reconstruction, rehabilitation of community infrastructure, and livelihood assistance in Batticaloa and Trincomalee Districts.

AmeriCares is working to renovate the Pediatric ward, Operations Theater, Mental Health Clinic, Blood Bank, Medical and Surgical wards, and Outpatient Department of the Elpitiya Base Hospital in Galle District.

CARE is supporting socio-economic empowerment, food production, infrastructure, saving and credit, and income generating activities

Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Batticaloa.

Mercy Corps has benefited over 330,000 people through economic and community recovery and development in Hambantota, Ampara, and Trincomalee.

Catholic Relief Services constructed transitional shelters, repaired damaged homes and constructed latrines in Tsunami affected divisions in Ampara and Batticaloa.

The Asia Foundation works with 35 local governments in tsunami and other areas to develop the capacity of the local governments by providing technical assistance and training.

Associates in Rural Development Inc. works nationwide with the Bribery Commission and Auditor General Department to improve their capacity to reduce corruption in the government sector.

Community Development Services works in Kurunegala, Mannar and in the south and west with two main Sri Lankan NGO partners and six local sub-grantees to increase awareness of HIV-AIDS and prevention.

Unfortunately some NGOs have been the target of unsubstantiated allegations in the Sri Lankan press and elsewhere. This has resulted in the staff of these NGOs being subject to physical harassment and intimidation. Such attacks jeopardize the valuable services and assistance these organizations provide to the Sri Lankan people.

All American NGOs are subject to very strict prohibitions under American law against providing any assistance to the LTTE, which is listed as a terrorist organization in the United States.

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If there are any allegations that humanitarian supplies are falling into LTTE hands, these NGOs and the United States Government would be pleased to cooperate fully to investigate promptly all such allegations and punish those who violate American law.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank and commend Minister for Disaster Management and Human Rights Mahinda Samarasinghe for his willingness to join us at this press conference and express the Government of Sri Lanka's support for the valuable work that international and indigenous NGOs are performing in Sri Lanka.

Thank you.

Minister Expresses Support

13. Minister of Disaster Management and Human Rights Mahinda Samarasinghe agreed to our request to participate and give remarks at the conclusion of the press conference. He noted that there are more than 3,000 NGOs registered to work in Sri Lanka. He told the media that he had seen on many occasions the excellent work that such NGOs are doing to develop the country. He stressed that the Government of Sri Lanka stands for the principle of supporting international NGOs. He condemned statements that had appeared in the media suggesting that the government did not support the work of international NGOs. He pledged that when complaints arise against specific NGOs, they would be investigated in a transparent and accountable manner and the NGO in question would be given the right to provide its side of the story. He further pledged that no public statements would be made by GSL officials nor would press articles appear in the official media while such investigations were underway, unless an NGO was caught violating Sri Lankan law "in flagrante delicto." He also announced that the government was planning to draft a code of conduct to set forth the parameters within which NGOs should operate in Sri Lanka. He said the code would build on similar codes in other countries and would be developed in full consultation with international NGOs. Finally, the Minister said that the government planned to develop a monitoring mechanism to ensure "proper end-to-end use of AID in conflict areas," to ensure that equipment and commodities are not

diverted to the LTTE.

13. COMMENT: The Minister's decision to attend and speak at this press conference was an important sign that the government takes donor and NGO concerns seriously and will make a serious effort to curtail the spate of unsubstantiated allegations that have appeared in the Sri Lankan press that have resulted in attacks on NGO representatives and other forms of intimidation and harassment.

BLAKE